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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 001424

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SUBJECT: MGLE01: A/S HILLEN MEETS WITH PM SINIORA

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SUMMARY

¶11. (C) Pol-Mil A/S Hillen informed Lebanon's PM Siniora that the final approvals were in the works for what we hope will be USD 10 million grant (Section 1206) for immediate equipment and training needs of the Lebanese Armed Forces. Expressing deep appreciation to the President and Secretary, PM Siniora said he hopes U.S.-Lebanese cooperation will enhance the country's security and help address the shared problem of terrorism. He emphasized the need for training, especially in developing a sense of teamwork. Siniora also noted the importance of the FBI/INL training to stand up two rapid-response teams. While A/S Hillen pressed Siniora on security reform and the need to have an empowered security coordinator in the PM's office, Siniora did not offer specific commitments. While downplaying the problem in hopes of finding a "local solution," PM Siniora said the GOL was still collecting information regarding the reported establishment of Syrian border positions inside Lebanese territory along the country's northeast border. Finally, the Prime Minister said he is continuing to push hard for the expeditious return of USCIT minor Kelsey Klotz. End summary.

¶12. (U) Assistant Secretary for Political-Military Affairs John Hillen met with Prime Minister Fouad Siniora at the Grand Serail Palace in downtown Beirut on May 3. The Prime Minister's senior advisor, Mohammad Chattah, as well the Ambassador, poloff, A/S Hillen's Special Assistant Matthew Lehrfeld and military aide Major Reginald Robinson, also attended the meeting.

¶13. (C) Noting that he was pleased to follow up the Secretary's visit to Beirut and the President's meeting and

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lunch with Siniora in Washington, A/S Hillen informed the PM that the State and Defense Departments had jointly approved the quick transfer of nearly USD \$10 million in Section 1206 funds, pending final approval by the President and Congressional notification. These funds would cover equipment (principally spare parts) and training for the LAF to upgrade its capability to defend Lebanon. Assuming approval, this assistance, which must be obligated before October 1, could be followed by additional security support in future fiscal years. A/S Hillen explained that a normally lengthy U.S. process was expedited in response to the President's commitment to help provide Lebanon needed

security support.

"WE WANT TO BE INVOLVED"

¶4. (C) PM Siniora expressed deep appreciation to A/S Hillen for the news, saying that he was grateful to the President and Secretary for responding to Lebanon's needs. The PM noted that he understood the need to keep the information private until the President gave the final approval. The PM explained that his government wanted to be involved in the fight against terrorism and was looking forward to increased cooperation with United States in this endeavor. Emphasizing the need for teamwork, he expressed particular eagerness to enhance the security environment of Lebanon through improvements in systems and training. Stating that underlying causes of terrorism also had to be addressed, Siniora was looking forward to "joining forces" with the U.S. to obtain necessary equipment and training. Siniora also indicated that the two countries could have better "exchanges of knowledge" regarding terrorist activities. As a result of his talks in Washington, he is very satisfied with the direction and content of the envisioned cooperation.

¶5. (C) Switching topics, Siniora noted that he also appreciated the assistance being provided by the FBI and INL to the ISF. He welcomed the fact that the FBI/INL assistance will include training on how to properly handle crime scenes.

He commented that when he visited the sites of past terrorist activities, he was surprised by the unorganized approach taken by Lebanese investigators. He said that he supported the plans to train at least two rapid-response teams in the near term. Those teams, he noted, should be able, as needed, to "work in tandem" with U.S. investigators.

MULTI-LATERAL SECURITY ASSISTANCE

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¶6. (C) A/S Hillen spoke of the desirability for GOL to work in a multilateral context with regard to future security assistance. PM Siniora acknowledged that the British government, as part of a multi-step security reform seminar, would deliver a "needs assessment" later this week, to be used in conjunction with CENTCOM's November-December 2005 equipment assessments. A/S Hillen made a strong pitch to the PM for security sector reform, noting our hope that the GOL would work with the British to reduce replication and develop sensible strategic thinking.

¶7. (C) When asked if his office would consider establishing a security assistance coordinator to facilitate cooperation in his office, PM Siniora admitted that much of the expertise in this area had left the government and perhaps it was time to re-establish this capability. Although Siniora did not immediately commit to the coordinator position, he did emphasize that Lebanon's security services were seriously deficient in inter-agency teamwork and this required attention.

¶8. (C) In closing the discussion on security assistance and reform, PM Siniora said that at the outset, it was important to concentrate on training and emphasize upgrading systems as more resources became available. He made a pitch again for concentrating on teamwork. A/S Hillen assured the Prime Minister that the Secretary is leaning forward on security assistance, and her continued support can be relied upon. PM Siniora once again extended his thanks to the Secretary for her "sincere commitment" to Lebanon's security.

SYRIAN PRESENCE ON DISPUTED TERRITORY

¶9. (C) When asked about recent activity by Syrian border

guards on Lebanese territory near the villages of Ras Baalbek and Arsal in the northeast part of the country, PM Siniora confirmed there has been questionable activity in both areas since late March, particularly near the village of Arsal. Siniora said the area, approximately 15 square kilometers in size, has long been in dispute, but usually over the question of land ownership as opposed to sovereignty. Siniora stated that all relevant maps clearly indicate the area in question belongs to Lebanon and, therefore, the Syrian positions were intrusive and unjustified.

¶10. (C) But the Prime Minister also tried to downplay the issue. He indicated he was attempting to resolve the matter with low-profile discussions, rather than diplomatic confrontation. Siniora said he had instructed his governor in the Biqa' region, Antoine Suleiman, to meet with his Syrian counterpart and find a mutually-acceptable solution. He acknowledged that Lebanon's border with Syria has long been ambiguous in many sections and formal demarcation was required. Although he wished to keep the matter at the local level, Siniora expressed hope that Syria's ill-considered actions may benefit Lebanon's position in UN Security Council discussions on a new resolution pertaining to 1559 issues.

AMCIT KELSEY KLOTZ

¶11. (SBU) The Ambassador raised the issue of USCIT minor Kelsey Klotz, who continues to be held illegally in Hizballah-controlled territory in the Biqa' Valley. PM Siniora said he understood the importance of returning the American child to U.S. custody as soon as possible and had instructed his Minister of Justice and Minister of the Interior to keep pressing the issue. Siniora also confirmed that parliamentary leader Saad Hariri was using his influence with Hizballah to expeditiously facilitate the return of the child. Siniora stated the matter was very important and he was keeping it at the forefront of his objectives.

¶12. (U) This cable has been cleared by A/S Hillen.
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